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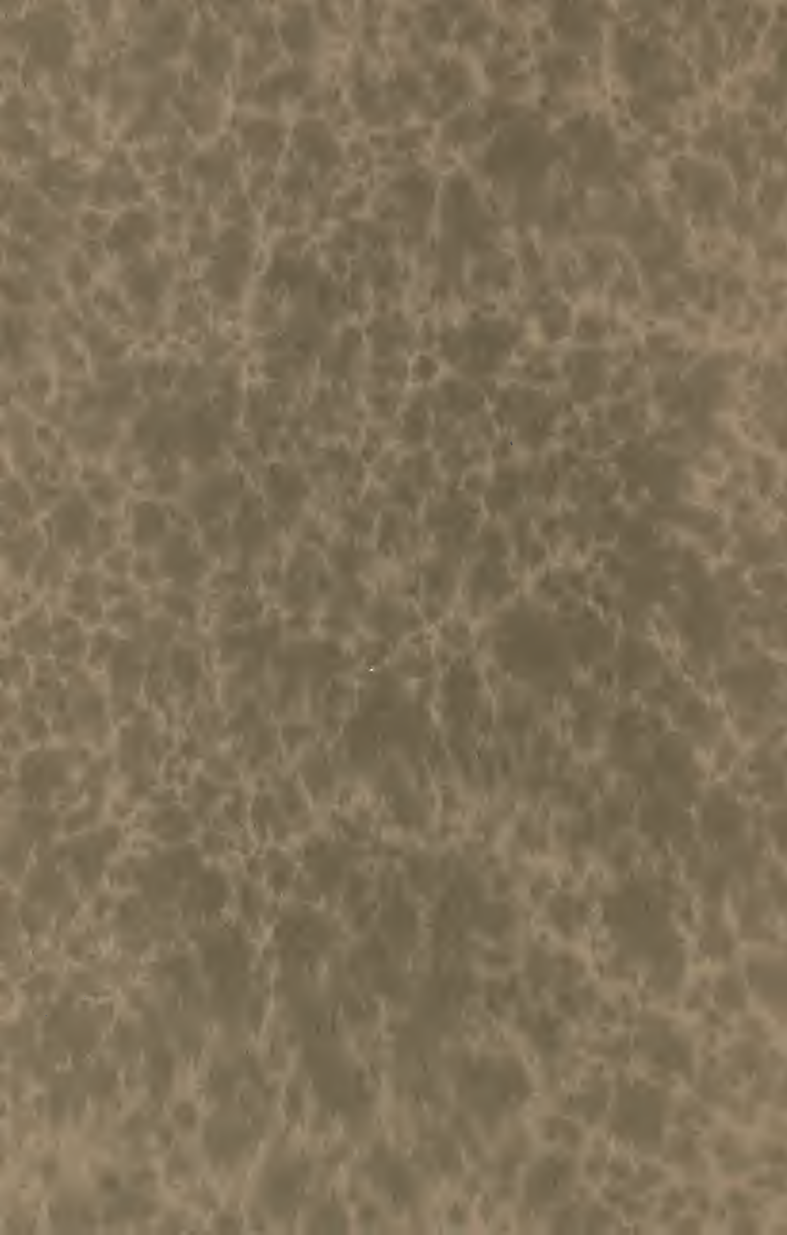
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The Adventures of
A Parrot



Harry Stillwell Edwards



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THE
ADVENTURES OF
A PARROT

By

HARRY STILLWELL EDWARDS

AUTHOR OF

"TWO RUNAWAYS," "HIS DEFENSE"
"ENEAS AFRICANUS," ETC.



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The Adventures of a Parrot

IT was a week long to be remembered by Helen's little boy. For the first time he was having a house-party. Without warning, probably without intention older than the day, the major had returned from Milledgeville with the great Worthington coach loaded to its capacity with small boys and girls industriously gathered up about town from families known to him for a lifetime, and to whom he was a never-failing source of interest. The day ranks in the memory of the staid old inhabitants with the anniversary of Lafayette's visit, Henry Clay's speech, the entry of Sherman's army, and the removal of the capital to Atlanta. For, be it known, it had not occurred, in the experience of any living person, that a Milledgeville boy or girl had set foot

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in that sacred vehicle, the Worthington coach. The experience of the town juvenile had been limited to open-mouthed interest in the vast contrivance, and a stampede when, the door having been flung wide open by Isam, the unfolding steps tumbled down to the curb recklessly, and ended their performance with a defiant snap. It was a distinct local sensation when the major began to drive about town among the old residences and inquire for children; and many were the stories that emanated from the occasion, to be told over hardwood fires, wine, and walnuts in the years to come. One of these will serve to illustrate the nature of the major's difficulties.

“De major’s compliments ter de missus,” said Isam, standing between the columns of Mrs. Throckmorton’s old home, “an’ he say won’t she please, ma’am, let de chillun come erlong wid ’im an’ stay out yonner ter Woodhaven wid Miss Helen’s little boy er few days.”



Old Mrs. Throckmorton came to the door, adjusting her lace cap and spectacles, her chin in the air.

“Why, bless my soul, Isam,” she said, elbowing the housemaid aside, “whose children is your master talking about?”

“Don’t know, ma’am; just any what might be lyin’ roun’ loose ’bout de house, I reck’n.”

The major thrust his head out of the coach window, and called:

“Good morning, ma’am! Your most obedient! Want to borrow the children a few days, ma’am. Helen will take good care of them, and I shall personally return—”

“Why, Major Worthington, what are you thinking about? I have no children!”

“Is it possible? Why, madam, you used to have—and the prettiest I ever saw.”

Mrs. Throckmorton laughed, with her hands on her sides, and then got out her handkerchief.

“Why, you dear absurd man, that was



years and years ago! I have grandchildren. John has three little girls, and Lucy has a boy and a girl—”

“Good! Up this street somewhere, I believe. Drive on, Aleck. Madam, your most obedient! By the way, ma’am, do you know of any more in the neighborhood?”

Mrs. Throckmorton was laughing and crying by turns.

“Yes,” she said, waving her hand; “I’ll tell Isam about them.”

“Your most obedient, ma’am!” And so it was the major gathered his house-party.

The old coach never delivered happier faces at Woodhaven than greeted Helen when, astonished at the tumult in the yard at dusk, she ran down the steps and one by one lifted out the excited visitors.

It is not purposed to follow the fortunes of the borrowed juveniles during their stay at Woodhaven. Those were days, indeed, full of rapture, and garnished with egg-hunts, garret



games, antique toys, and stories told while the blue flames hovered over the smoldering oak log when the evening was chilly. It is sufficient to say that the supreme hero, the friend of every youngster, the vade-mecum of each child, was admittedly the smiling little old negro Isam, full of cunning inventions to amuse and a marvelous fund of adventures.

So it is not surprising that one day when he had rolled the great coach into the yard under the shade of the elms, where he could reach the faucet by the porch conveniently, and was cheerily removing the Baldwin County clay from the running-gear, he should have had the whole party about his ears. The little girls beamed through the windows of the coach, playing at visiting, while on the seat above outside, and on the one between the great carved leather springs behind, the boys gave imitations of coachmen, footmen, and tiger. On the porch, level with them, and but little above the head of the cheery old negro, the



major was throned in his chair as usual, and near him was Helen, with a few of the older Milledgeville folks, who had dropped in for the day to look after the children and to replenish their wardrobes. A sympathetic remark from one of these concerning Isam's prodigious task gave the old fellow's conversation a new drift, and before he realized it he was arousing a general interest.

"Yes'm," he said; "hit's er sho-'nough job ter wash dis hyah ole care-edge. F'om fus ter las' I 'spec', hit's mighty nigh on ter er half-mile erroun', an' worse ef you tek er short cut unner, fer de mud hangs heavy at de bottom. But hit don't happ'n often. Marse Craffud is er po' han' ter ramble roun' much nowadays. Ef folks got business wid *him* dey got ter come *hyah*. Ef hit warn't fer de ole ladies 'bout de kentry what knows es judgment is good, an' keep er-sendin' fer 'im ter come erlong an' 'dvide dey-all, reck'n we'd des nat-chully lay roun' an' go ter seed."



The children were not yet listening, but the older company smiled amiably, and one sweet-voiced lady dropped the busy man an encouraging remark touching the major's far-famed courtesy.

"Yes'm; Marse Craffud is de bes' in de lan' when hit comes ter passin' de time o' day wid er lady. I heah 'im say de bes' way ter give er woman good 'dvice is ter fus find out des what she wants ter do, an' den tell 'er ter do hit."

The major laughed with the others at this; but perhaps he alone noticed that Isam's remark, begun on one side of the coach, was finished on the other.

"Ole Mis' Tomlinson," continued the negro, "sen' for 'im ter come, an' she say as how de lan' joinin' ter her is fer sale, an' she don't know des what is bes' ter do. Marse Craffud size her up quick an' say: 'Buy—buy, of course! Why, madam, dey ain't no better place ter put yo' money. Some years hit don't



pay much, but lan' don't git erway f'om you. Hit's allus right dere.' An' ole Mis' Lamkin sen' fer 'im, an' say she done been offered good price for some outlayin' patches. Marse Craffd up an' say,—'cause he knowed money was scyarce wid her,—'Sell—by all means, sell, madam. Hit's er bad plan ter be lan'-po'; an' ef you sell some, you can mek de balance do better.' ”

The major took his foot off the balustrade and reached for his stick; but Isam was on the opposite side of the coach, and very busy.

“Let him go on, major,” said one of the ladies, laughing; “we are greatly interested. Some day we may need your advice.”

“Yes'm,” continued Isam, apparently ignorant of the by-play; “but one day we got word f'om ole Mis' Sykes ter please come over an' she'd be proud ter have er talk wid us on business. Now dis was noos ter ev'ybody, 'cause ole Mis' Sykes don't set much store by dis hyah settlement. Some time back she let out



dat in her 'pinion de place was right 'longside er de broad road ter—" Isam wrung out the sponge and glanced toward the children. "Well, Marse Craffud sont word back dat he liked de stand he had 'cause hit give him er chance ter see de las' of so many pious friends, an' some dat wan't; an' ole Mis' Sykes she took dis ter mean ole man Sykes, what died of er 'speriment wid er noo way ter mix es toddy. F'om dat dey she ain' so much as pass de house widout pullin' de care-edge curt'ins down. Dat's huccum I say hit was noos ter ev'ybody when she sont word of her wantin' ter talk business wid we-all. An' now, ef you ladies want ter heah 'bout dat trip, an' de parrot over dere, I reck'n I des 'bout got time ter 'splain it."

Isam nodded his head toward the major, who laughed aloud and began to stuff his pipe. The children heard the word "parrot," and scrambled eagerly over to Isam's side of the coach. The old man shot a quick glance to-



ward his master, and opened the coach door, letting the steps roll down.

“Now,” he said, “ef you little girls want ter heah 'bout dis hyah parrot, des set up an' down hyah an' wait tell I kinder work up de p'int, which ain't goin' ter tek long. No, ma'am, we warn't 'spectin' ter heah f'om ole Mis' Sykes, but me an' Aleck got out dis hyah care-edge an' put off wid Marse Craffud for her house. We got dere safe an' soun', an' foun' her stannin' at de top er de step wid 'er bes' lace cap an' black dress, an' smilin' like hit done her *so* much good ter see us at las.' Marse Craffud he tip es hat an' say, 'Madam, yo' most obedient!' an' work es way up ter de po'ch, while I drap down 'bout ha'f-way an' wait for ter see what de game was. Ole Mis' Sykes she smile an' shake 'er two curls an' say as how hit was mighty good of us ter come. An' Marse Craffud talk back des as perlite, an' say, 'Don't mention hit! De pleasure is ours.' An' wid dat he drap inter er po'ch



rocker an' tek er long bref. Mis' Sykes looks like her conscience hurt her 'bout somep'n', an' she say hit pains her so much ter put we-all ter so much trouble. An' Marse Craffud bow as low as he could wid him er-settin' down an' say: 'Madam, yo' mos' obedient! Hit's er pleasure ter serve you, madam.' An' wid dat he begun ter fan wid es hat. 'Erbout dis time I got de shock er my life. Somep'n' right over my head up an' say:

"'Oh, sister, what is it? Where did you find it?'

"Bless God! but I jumped up, an' dere sot de ugliest bird my eye ever fell on—an' de fines', too. When I look in es eye an' face; my scalp feel like hit done been fros'-bit; but when I look at es jacket, hit was des natchully de prettiest—Lord! but de peafowl warn't nowhar! Green an' gol' an' red, an' es tail droppin' straight down erbout two foot! I stop erbout ha'f-way ter de gate, an' see ole Mis' Sykes run ter de bird an' give hit er nut



an' sorter shoo hit erlong de rail. An' dere he sot. 'Bout dat time de bird look at me an' say, 'Git out, nigger!' "

The children clapped their hands and screamed, and Isam wagged his head.

"I begin ter hunt roun' erbout for de care-edge, when Marse Craffud mek me come back. I drap down erg'in on de step, wid my mouf lef' open an' my eye sot on dat bird. I heah Marse Craffud say as how hit was er fine bird, an' he seen 'em befo' in Mexico; an' I knowed den 't was de same he been talkin' erbout so much. Wid dat, an' de sun er-shinin' on my bar' head, de scalp sorter begin ter tek on er little life. Den ole Mis' Sykes say, oom-hoo! dat's what de matter. She done got her three little gran'-daughters stayin' in de house, an' de bird cuss an' swear an' talk so much badness she cyan't have hit roun', an' don't know des what she goin' ter do. Marse Craffud tell her ter wring its neck, but she throw up 'er han's so,"—Isam gave a comical imitation,



much to the delight of the children,—“an’ say de bird belongs ter her nephew, Mr. Jim Sykes, who been had ’er in Galveston fo’ years an’ he thinks de worl’ of ’er. Mr. Jim say de bird is one of de queens of de yearth, but ole Mis’ Sykes say she don’t see whar de queen comes in—dat she believes de bird is one of dem Mexican rebelutioners, an’ dat she’s powerful pestered ter think she done got mixed up wid hit, an’ mus’ stay mixed up tell Mr. Jim gets back f’om whar he gone. Marse Craffud up an’ say: ‘Why ’n’t you sen’ hit out ter de quarters, madam, an’ let de niggers tek cyar of hit?’ But Mis’ Sykes say, no; she done try dat ’speriment de day befo’, an’ ef she hadn’t stop putty quick, wouldn’t been nair nigger lef’ on de place. She say Ole Nelse, de driver, tell her dat de bird talk ter cats an’ dogs an’ chickens in dey own languidge tell es ha’r rise on es head. An’ at night big owl come up in de cedar, roll es eyes, an’ say: ‘Whoo! whoo! whoo!’ ter de parrot, an’ de



parrot up an' flung back cuss-words an' brash talk till de clock struck twelve an' de moon dodge unner er cloud. Ole Nelse is er per-sidin' elder, an' he say as how he been tole in es sleep dat dis was de painted Jessebel what de sojers flung out er de winder, come back on de yearth ter temp' de soul of man; an' dat settle hit. Dey brought de bird back in er cotton-basket covered wid er bag an' slung on er fence-rail 'twix' two niggers, de fus nigger sweatin' like er July mule, 'cause es back was nex' ter de basket an' er-burnin' wid onnatchul fire."

"What did the owl say, Unc' Isam?" asked one of the delighted girls, while the smiling old man was drawing a bucket of clean water from the faucet.

"'Whoo! whoo! whoo!' You see, honey, he ain't never seen nothin' like dat bird in all es born days. He seen de blue jay, de red-bird, de robin, de sparrer-hawk, de game rooster, an' de peafowl; but dis hyah was er



noo one on him. Look like de whole bird crowd been rolled inter one, an' got es nose mash down over es chin ter boot. De owl was des natchully tryin' ter strike up er 'quaintance an' pass de time o' day."

"What did the parrot say, Unc' Isam?"

"'Carrajo—corambo—bonum—noctum—oh, sister!' an', 'Git out, nigger!' Leastwise, dat's what he say when I got nex' ter 'er in de night; an' more besides. But, pshaw! hit ain't fit for you chillun to heah 'bout. Dat's des de reason why ole Mis' Sykes tryin' ter git shet of 'er. Whar was I in dis story, anyhow?"

"They were bringing the bird back in the basket," shouted the children.

"Oom-hoo, das right. Well, Marse Craffud sot up in es chair an' cover es mouf wid es han'k'ch'ef, an' say: 'Madam, you int'rest me mightily. De case is an oncommon one.' Ole Mis' Sykes 'low dat hit sholy was. She say dat de bird out-talk her ole French teacher an' out-cuss er Spaniard pirate. An' she go on an'



tell how de bird work erlong de fence ter de oak whar de pet squir'l come up f'om de grove an' scyard 'im so wid er adj'tive when he was peepin' roun' de limb whar she sot, dat little bushy-tail fell forty foot ter de groun', an' put out for es hole like de devil was reachin' for him."

A shout from the children gave the réconteur encouragement. He continued:

"You can laugh; Marse Craffud wanted ter laugh, too, but he had ter set dere an' swell up like er frog, while ole Mis' Sykes beat erbout an' 'splain how de bird got ter de chick'n-house at las', an' took up wid de crowd at night for company; an' how she quar'led wid de rooster tell he 'mos' lef' off crowin' in de night. Ole Mis' Sykes say de trouble on her min' is dis: she cyan't let de chillun heah sech talk, not even f'om er bird, an' she cyan't 'spose of Mr. Jim's pet; an' dere you are!

"Well, sah," continued Isam, addressing everybody in general, "Marse Craffud sot



dere an' 'bout ter 'splode, but he look like de head mo'ner at er funerul. Bimeby he up an' say 't is sholy a bad case, an' how can he serve 'er in 'er great trouble. Well, chillun, de ole lady been waitin' fer de openin', an' she step right in. She say as how she unnerstan' dat Miss Helen an' de little boy was off ter Macon, an' mebbe de major would tek de bird for er while; dat cussin' warn't no noo thing over hyah, an' wouldn't hurt nobody. Ole Mis' Sykes try ter be funny wid Marse Craffud, an' tell him mebbe he would like some company b'sides es own, an' mebbe he could git some noo cuss-words, too. Well, I tek my eye off de bird, an' look back for somep'n' ter happen, an' hit did. Marse Craffud sot up straight, an' fix es eye on de ole lady. I ain't goin' ter tell you what he say, 'cause he was hot in de collar an' powerful aggervated; but ole Mis' Sykes clap her hands ter her head an' scream out: 'Oh, major, Major Worthington, you shock me!'



“ ‘Bout dis time I like ter jump out er my skin, for de bird raise ’er wings an’ give er yell what start like er peafowl an’ quit like er holy laugh. Den she say, sorter dancin’ roun’ on de rail an’ talkin’ th’ough ’er nose, ‘Pour water on ’im! Burn es foot! He’s swearin’!’ an’ follered it up with forty-’leven kinds of cussin’. An’ dere sot Marse Craffud, puffin’ an’ er-poppin’ es eyes.

“ ‘Young ’oman,’ he say, des so, ‘young ’oman, wait tell *I* get you home!’

“But hit did n’ scyar dat bird, ’cause she ain’t never met Marse Craffud befo’. She des cake-walk erwhile, an’ den stop an’ cock up fus one eye an’ de yuther like she all of er sudden gittin’ int’rested in es case. ‘Sister,’ she say to ole Mis’ Sykes, ‘who is de fat man?’ Den she had ter dodge Marse Craffud’s stick, what he flung, an’ while I was er-fetchin’ hit f’om de yard she was er-edgin’ erlong de rail, sayin’, ‘Oh, my! oh, my! what a naughty, naughty boy! Put ’im out! put ’im out!’ ”



By this time, as may be supposed, the children were hilarious, and the older group greatly amused. The major smoked in silence, looking off across the fields. Isam took occasion to return to the side of the coach from which he had started, opening the door and letting down the steps for the children, who crossed over tumultuously.

“Dere, now, chillun, des keep yo’ mouf shet an’ you won’t git no soap-suds in hit. Whar was I in dis hyah ’sperience, anyhow?” he said.

“Polly was telling her to put him out,” said Helen’s little boy.

“Oom-hoo! Well, Marse Craffud c’ntrol esse’f, an’ say he don’t blame Mis’ Sykes er bit, an’ de bird ain’t fit company fer no lady much less de chillun, an’ he’d tek ’er off ’er han’s wid pleasure. He say he reck’n he will ’joy de company of so smart er bird, an’ he promise ’er he ain’ goin’ ter let nothin’ happen ter ’er, an’ when shall he tek ’er.



“Den Mis’ Sykes say dey done reach er-nuther trouble. De chillun done got so ’tached ter de bird hit would bre’k dey hearts ef dey thought she’d give ’er erway, an’ ’fo’ dey eyes. Ef somebody could come over in de night an’ sorter pertend ter steal de bird, she’d have somep’n’ ter go on nex’ day. De stealin’ would be easy, she say, ’cause de bird roos’ in de little hen-house, like I tole you; an’ dere warn’t no dog an’ nair nigger nigher ’n de quarters. Marse Craffud catch de p’int quick, an’ laugh er little. He say: ‘All right, madam; I think de plan er mighty good one. I’ll sen’ Isam over erbout nine ter-night, or mebbe later.’

“ ‘Who? Me?’ says I, wakin’ up. ‘Who? Me?’ says I, erg’in.

“ ‘Yes,’ says he, ‘*you!*’

“I look up at Marse Craffud an’ quit talk-in’; but I walk erroun’ dat bird, an’ look at ’er f’om head ter foot, an’ dere warn’t no way I can get whar she ain’t er-facin’. ‘Honey,’ says



I, 'mebbe I'll be 'long atter you 'bout nine, an' mebbe I'll be 'long erbout ten; hit 'pends on how I'm er-feelin' ter-night.'

"Marse Craffud an' ole Mis' Sykes was up an' er-sasshayin' erroun' one ernuther an' passin' compliments. I pick up a little stick 'bout big as my finger an' lay hit 'cross de bird's mouf, which she was er-holdin' open while rearin' back f'om me. De mouf shet, an' de stick drap down in two pieces.

" 'Git out, nigger!' says she.

" 'Das des 'zactly what I'm er-aimin' ter do, honey,' says I. 'Mebbe, I might not come erlong back befo' ten an' er ha'f; but lemme tell you, when I do come, you look close, an' you goin' ter see more hyah den me.' An' dere I lef' 'er.

"Marse Craffud look out of care-edge winder an' say, 'Madam, yo' mos' obedient!' an' de bird drap one of 'er rainbow wings down erbout er foot an' er ha'f, stretch 'er leg unner it, give er long gape, an' say, 'Sister, I foun' it,



but you c'n play with 't.' 'Spec' you chillun tired hearin' Isam ramble 'long 'bout dis hyah ole parrot?"

"Oh, no, Unc' Isam! Did you go back for her? Please tell us some more!" The air was full of voices.

"Well," said the old man, holding up his hands, "I an't said I warn't goin' ter tell yer. Hit's des er way I got, an' hit gimme time ter ketch er bref. Whar was I?"

"You had just left old Mrs. Sykes," exclaimed a voice.

"Oom-hoo! Well, Marse Craffud insist on me trav'lin' 'long back for de Mexican bird, an' I b'gin ter stiddy erbout hit. When I seen dat bird lop off de stick wid 'er mouf what look like er flower-shears, an' hit come ter me dat I got ter feel roun' in dat hen-house for 'er, an' in de dark, I knowed I mus' have help. So while Marse Craffud was er-noddin' up dere in de po'ch erbout sundown, I go over yonner. I don't reck'n nair one er you chillun



ever met wid er nigger by de name of Sandy Cornelius. Ter be sho, you ain't; hit's been fo' years ago. Sandy was hyah f'om de Shoulderbone deestric' in Hancock, er-raisin' of some money ter buil' er frame chu'ch fer Macedony—leastwise, dat's what he say. Er reg'lar back'oods nigger, an' aggervatin'! Lord! Lord! but des ter heah dat nigger say 'Deah brother' was 'nough ter mek er man drap es han' on es hip or look roun' for er ax. Sandy Cornelius!" Isam's contempt was apparent but absolutely indescribable.

"Sandy," said the major to the ladies, as he reloaded his pipe, "was paying special attention to a friend of Isam's named 'Cindy."

"An' dat's er fac'," said Isam; "but 'Cindy ain't so much as look at 'im twicst. Well, in my perdicerment 'bout fetchin' dat bird, I hunt up Sandy. I know dat 'bout dat time he'd be ready for er chanst ter d'stinguish esse'f wid er present ter 'Cindy; an' de devil went erlong wid me ter find 'im. We foun' 'im, an'



me an' him had er talk, wid de devil lookin' on an' sayin' nothin'. I tell dat nigger dat Marse Craffud done specialize him an' me for some work he could n' trus' nobody else wid. I 'splain as how ole Mis' Sykes had er Mexican game rooster she want ter git shet of de worse in de worl', but dat de chillun was so sot on 'im we mus' come an' git 'im atter dark, so she could sorter mek believe somebody done stole 'im. I 'splain ter de nigger dat de Mexican games was so pow'ful mean dey had ter cut de spurs off of 'em ter give de yuther chickens er chanst ter live, an' dat dey was 'bout as good at bitin' as kickin'. He tuk it all in like er catfish swaller'in er worm. He was one er dese hyah know-ev'ything niggers. 'Dey tells me,' he say, 'dere is er game chick'n down yonner in Cheecago, which is de capital of South Afferky, dat when he fights des lifts er common chick'n off er de groun' by de back of es neck, an' sticks 'im full er holes wid fus one foot an' den de yuther.' 'Oom-hoo!' says



I, 'dat's de ve'y same Mexican game! Marse Craffud an' me is er-layin' out ter git de breed an' wipe out de Shawlnecks down-town what put us out er business 'bout fo' years ago.' 'Well,' says Sandy, 'I don't mind goin' erlong, seein' as how hit ain't sho-'nough stealin'—an' dey ain't no dog! But dere's er meetin' erlong de way at Smyrny Chu'ch. An', besides, whar does I come in?' says he.

"Now dat's de fus ques'ion you get f'om er nigger, an' I was er-layin' for 'im. 'De Bible,' says I, 'lows dat de laborer is worthy of es hire, an' ole Mis' Sykes mus' n't 'spec' ter git 'er work done free. I'm goin' ter hol' de chick'n-house do' for you,' says I, 'an' ef you happ'n ter drap erbout fo' hens in de bag erlong wid de Mexican ter keep 'im company, dere ain't goin' ter be no witness. An' I heah 'Cindy say yestiddy dat she des er-honin' an' er-honin' for fresh meat.' Dat hit 'im, an' he stop ter stiddy. 'How I goin' ter find dis Mexican game in de dark?' he inquire. 'Ain't



no trouble 'bout dat,' I say. 'He got er tail two foot long. Des feel 'long unner de roos' tell you strike dat tail, an' den let yo' han' travel up ter es two legs whar de spurs been trim off; an' den drap 'im in de bag. An', nigger,' says I, 'don't you hurt dat bird, or let 'im holler an' wake de chillun! Tek 'im quick by es foot an' neck, an' drap 'im in de bag.' Sandy stedly some more, an' inquire 'bout de dog. Bimeby he say, all right; he go 'long ter keep me company. I got er bag wid er drawstring in de top, an' 'bout time de moon rise we put out for ole Mis' Sykes'. When we come ter Smyrny, Unc' Rich' was des er-linin' out de secon' verse of de hyme,

Travel on, travel on,
We'll all travel on.

"But hit look like I warn't goin' ter git Sandy ter travel on pas' dat do'. 'Come on, nigger!' says I, des so. 'Come on! We ain' goin' ter be long er-gittin' back. 'Cindy ain'



in dere yit, or you'd done heah her putty voice lifted in praise.' De soun' er de gal's name start 'im ter thinkin' 'bout hens, an' es foot got light erg'in. We come erlong, putty soon, by Smyrny buryin'-groun', an' he pull up an' say, 'Hush! You gwine thoo dat place?' 'Oom-hoo! honey,' says I, 'an' now you know des why I fotch yer erlong. Dere ain' nothin' goin' ter bother nobody in er buryin'-groun',' says I, 'but yer feel mo' sut'n erbout hit when yer travelin' wid company.' 'How far we got ter go ter git erroun'?' says he. 'Well,' says I, 'erbout er mile.' 'Is dat all?' says Sandy. An' he struck out up de big road, wid me er-treadin' on es heels.

"De moon hit was high when we got ter ole Mis' Sykes'," continued Isam, "an' de big house was plumb dark. De little hen-house do' slides up an' down in er groove, an' I hol' hit up an' sen' Sandy in wid de bag hangin' roun' es neck. Putty soon I heah er flutter, an' I say, 'One hen!' Den I heah ernuther flutter



—‘Two hen!’ Den I heah ernuther flutter, an’ I say, ‘Three hen!’ Den I heah ernuther flutter, an’ I say, ‘Fo’ hen!’ ’Bout de time I was er-gittin’ ready ter try an’ save ernough hen fer ole Mis’ Sykes ter start business wid erg’in, dere come er mighty rustle an’ er splutteration, an’ I heah Sandy cuss. All of er sudden er voice f’om somewhar hollered: ‘Help! Murder! Whyn’t yer crow? Let me out, nigger! Let me out!’ I fell back, an’ down drap de do’, an’, chillun, I heah Sandy inside say, wid er trimble in es voice:

“ ‘Who dat talkin’ ter—ter—ter—me?’

“De voice in dere come erg’in: ‘Help! Help! Let me out, nigger! Let me out, nigger!’

“I could des heah Sandy feelin’ roun’ inside, his finger-nails er-huntin’ cracks, an’ he up an’ say er little louder:

“ ‘Wait er minute, honey, whoever yer is! Wait er minute, an’ I gwine ter let us all out!’

“De voice holler louder an’ louder:



“Murder! Murder! Burn es foot! Po’ water on ’im!” An’ mebbe de parrot he sorter pinch de nigger’s leg thoo de bag wid es flower-shears—I dunno; but de nex’ thing I do know, Sandy give er yell like de devil had ’im, an’ come erg’inst de side of de chick’n-house so hard he knock down de whole business on top er me. Time I scramble out he was gone er-rackin’ up de road ter beat de ban’, de bird er-cussin’ at ev’y jump. Well, sah,” continued Isam, when the children were through with their laugh, “I begin ter git skeered merse’f. I say, ef dat nigger ain’t headed off by somebody, he goin’ ter bus’ dat fool bird’s brains out erg’inst somep’n’, er fling ’er clean erway. But, pshaw! dat string done slip up roun’ Sandy’s neck, an’ de mo’ he pull de tighter hit git, tell he was mighty nigh choke down. I sighted ’im des as he struck de cemetery an’ lodge in de wire fence, er-fightin’ an’ er-pantin’. ’Bout time I got dere he bre’k loose, an’ I seen ’im run sprang bang



inter de white rock angel—de ole man wid er cyarved grass-hook 'twix' es knees what sets on top er ole man Toby's grave. Well, sah, what wid dat, an' de bird inside de bag hollerin' 'Murder! Stop, nigger!' an' mixin' up er lot o' Mexican talk, de nigger fa'rly lep er hunderd yard. I des heah 'im say, 'Leg, save de body,' an' yonner he go. I'm er putty good mover in de night merse'f," said Isam, looking round on his audience, "an' mo' expecial ef er man es tryin' ter lef' me in er buryin'-groun'; so I drap mer foot erlong in es tracks fas' ernough ter keep mer eye on 'im. An' den I seen he was er-headin' for Smyrny Chu'ch. When he struck de road he turn inter hit, but I kep' de paf, an' we git ter de chu'ch 'bout same time. Lord, Lord! Den we had hit—den we had hit!"

"Had what, Unc' Isam?" asked the oldest boy, eagerly.

"I dunno what yer call hit, but we sholy had hit. I lean up 'g'inst de do' fer ter ketch



mer wind, an' Sandy run down de aisle ter de mo'ners' bench by de pulpit, tore at de string roun' es neck, an' drap down in er heap, puf-fec'ly pluralize an' proselyte on de flo'. Ole Unc' Rich' was in de ac' of prayin' for grace, and' some er de sisters was des startin' ter rock an' moan, when dey see de nigger Sandy, all mix up wid de bag, roll over on de flo' like er man possess of er sperrit. Dey jump up, crane deir necks ter look, an' 'bout dat time somep'n' in de bag squirm an' begin ter yell like er man in er cellar: 'Murder! Help! Carrajo—corambo—bonum—noctum! Oh, Jim! Let me out, nigger!' an' ter spit out all kind o' scand'lous cuss-words. Somebody's girl let fly er scream loud ernough ter split er plank, an' dat settle hit!"

Isam threw down his sponge and leaned up against the carriage, wagging his head, his face twisted into laughter-wrinkles.

"Dat *do* settle hit. Ole Unc' Rich' fall back'ds f'om de pulpit th'ough de winder, an'



hit de groun' er-runnin'. De niggers inside dey fall over one ernuther an' me, an' fight for de do' tell dey 'mos' tromple what little win' I had lef' plumb outer me. What wid dey yellin' an' er-whoopin' an' er-breakin' down de benches, hit was ernough ter raise er dead man. But hit did n' raise Sandy. Did n' nothin' raise 'im tell I cut dat sack loose an' sot 'im up. He took er bref er two, an' one mo' look at de squirm in de bag, an' was gone. De niggers dey seen 'im comin' up de road, an' dey led 'im er race ter de quarters, whar ev'ry do' was barred. Dey do say dat at twelve o'clock nex' day dat nigger done reach es home on de far side er Hancock, forty miles f'om Smyrny!"

A happy smile fluttered over the old negro's face when the laughter and applause of his audience had subsided, to be suddenly chased away by mock-seriousness, as a little boy put the question:



“What became of the parrot and the hens, Unc’ Isam?”

“Now des listen at dat! Chile, anybody’d know yo’ pa was one er de bes’ lawyers in de lan’, des watchin’ *you*. Don’t never lose sight er nothin’! Well, I fotched de bag erlong back ter Marse Craffud, an’ Marse Craffud up an’ say we mus’ keep de business quiet, ’cause dere ain’t nair nigger in dis settlement ever goin’ inter er hen-house atter dark f’om now on; an’ some er dis ’sperience boun’ ter leak out an’ spread roun’. An’ we kept our end quiet, for Mr. Jim Sykes got back onexpected de ve’y nex’ day, an’ come er-bilin’ over ter git es bird. Marse Craffud was mighty glad ter git shet of ’er. But de story of what happen in dat chu’ch—Lord! Lord! but hit’s still er-growin’! Dey warn’t er nigger dere but smell sulphur; an’ Unc’ Rich’ ’lows he seed er fiery han’ reach out f’om de bag an’ ketch Sandy by de neck. Aunt ’Mandy say when she look back f’om up de road, she seed somep’n’



spout'n' fire f'om es eyes an' nose an' mouf
tearin' back ter git in de cemetery."

"What became of the hens, Unc' Isam?"
persisted the little boy.

The old man studied gravely the face of his
questioner.

"Honey, when you done growed up ter be
er jedge on de bench, too, dere ain' no nigger
in dis county goin' ter be able ter keep esse'f
outside er de rock-pile!"

"What became of the hens?"

"Well, chile, de hens was des so natchully
bruise up an' 'turbed en sperrit dey warn't no
good for nothin'. I let 'Cindy have 'em ter
git some feathers for er piller she er-makin'."

The major coughed violently, and his pipe
shot a shower of sparks into the air.

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